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SPYS AND COPS MAKE PERFECT MATCH -- ALMOST
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WASHINGTON

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is campaigning to enlist big city cops in its spy wars overseas but has run into some resistance from police chiefs reluctant to part with experienced investigators.

CIA spokesman Kathy Pherson, questioned about the spy agency's new recruiting effort, said it is targeted on 18 major city police departments and aims to tap policemen's skills for "the regular work of intelligence gathering which involves looking for the right information to pass along to headquarters."

Pherson said the agency had no definite number of policemen or retired police officials in mind but the emphasis was to find full-time career agents -- not, as some news accounts have portrayed it, to set up a special, temporary counter-terrorism unit.

"That is not how we looked at it," she said of those reports. "We are trying to recruit the right people with the right skills. The trick is getting the right people."

"It is the same thing as in other areas," Pherson said. "We have a crying need for engineers and computer scientists, for instance, and are trying just as hard to find them."

The CIA, which has long recruited detectives and other police specialists for their investigative skills, stepped up its recruiting with a seminar last July to which 18 police department officials -- including representatives from New York, San Francisco, Boston, Houston, Philadelphia and Los Angeles -- were invited.

Its recruiters hoped to gain support for hiring more qualified police.

While most were cooperative and allowed the agency to advertise the available posts, a few were not happy about having experienced officers enticed away by the allure of overseas work, better pay or greater prestige.

Los Angeles gave the CIA a flat "no," police officials there said.

"The Los Angeles police department is not in the business of recruiting for other agencies. We are not recruiting for the CIA," said spokesman Lt. Dan Cooke.

In Miami, police officials said they would cooperate.

"We've hired from federal agencies in the past and they've hired from us. Mobility between agencies is good," said Bobby Jones, director of the Metro-Dade Police Department, encompassing Miami's metropolitan area.

Jones said he was among the officials of 18 major municipal police departments asked last July to aid CIA enlistment of active and retired policemen for counter-terrorism operations abroad.

He said he did not know whether any of his policemen had been contacted for recruitment by the agency or whether any had yet expressed interest in joining it.

But one high-ranking officer said the CIA was expected to give extra scrutiny to the hiring of Miami cops because of reports of widespread drug-related corruption in that force.

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Two dozen officers have been arrested this year on charges ranging from home invasion to murder conspiracy.

"You can be sure they don't want to get stuck with our bad apples," said this official, who asked not to be identified.

CIA recruitment is nothing new for Miami, a city that has gained a reputation because of its heavy concentration of spies, revolutionaries and cocaine kingpins.

The agency hired 1,400 Cuban exiles in Miami for the ill-fated, U.S.-backed invasion at Cuba's Bay of Pigs in 1961. In the early 1980s, it helped Nicaraguan exiles in Miami to form rebel armies now fighting Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

In Detroit, the police department has "not received anything from the CIA, as yet," but would have no objection to officers acting as operatives for the agency, said Sgt. Christopher Buck, a department spokesman.

"It all depends on the individual police officers," he said. "It wouldn't be our policy to tell an officer to join or not to join."

In New York, Inspector Robert Burke said 210 of the city's detectives and investigators in special units expressed interest in joining the CIA and 68 took an eight-hour examination on October 4.

Burke said the 210 who expressed interest "were told that the jobs were contracts for three years and that they would probably not be retained as permanent CIA employees."

New York Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward, "I expect we will lose very few people. It is an overseas assignment under very dangerous conditions. But if anyone is interested I won't hold him back."

Chicago's cops have yet to get the call from the CIA but Superintendent Fred Rice is willing to offer leaves of absences.

Rice, who attended the CIA seminar in July, said: "We would certainly cooperate with the CIA if it tries to recruit Chicago police officers to beef up the agency's anti-terrorist forces overseas."

"Rather than working with green recruits they'd rather have trained police officers," Rice said.